

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY



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No. 406.

Price, Five Cents.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE VAMPIRE

OR
SMUGGLERS OF THE DEEP SEA



BY
THE AUTHOR
OF NICK CARTER

"Your life is forfeit, and I must kill," said the giant Chinaman, as he deliberately drew a huge knife from his sash and stepped slowly toward Chick.



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THE CAPTAIN OF THE VAMPIRE

OR,

The Smugglers of the Deep Sea.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

BY LESS THAN A HAIR'S BREADTH.

"She can't stand this strain much longer, Mr. Carter."

"Then luff her up a bit and hold her so that we will drift astern slowly. But don't make too much sternway, captain."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"We must lie on and off about here if we hope to discover anything this dark night."

"Ay, ay, sir; I reckon I can hold her."

Nick Carter smiled grimly while he pulled his sou'-wester more snugly around him and brushed the spray from his eyes with his disengaged hand.

Any person who has chanced at any time in his

career to have been off the coast of Long Island, just east of where Hempstead Bay puts into the northern shore of it—anyone who has happened in that vicinity in a twenty-four-foot sloop when a terrific northeaster was on the rampage, will appreciate the difficulties and discomforts which Capt. Bill Jones and his two companions were encountering.

It was Capt. Bill Jones, formerly of the *Cameron Pride*,* and the two men with him in the sloop, were Nick Carter and his assistant, Chickering.

Add to the gale, which was lashing the water around them into mountains of heaving foam, the blackness of an impenetrably dark night, and the proximity of a

*See No. 404 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "The Trail of the Vampire."

treacherous and dangerous coast, and some idea of the genuine peril of the position of the sloop and her passengers may be conceived.

And yet, every one of the three men was as cool and wary, as alert and ready for action, as if the experience they were undergoing was one to which they were daily accustomed.

Somebody, in an attempt to be facetious, has described a night, which is as black as your hat, as darkness which might be felt; and certainly this particular occasion seemed to take all the facetiousness out of the remark and to render it perfectly logical, for, save for an occasional glimpse of the rough outline of the Long Island hills to the south of them, nothing—absolutely nothing—could be seen.

The storm hissed and screamed on every side of them; breakers thundered against the coast to the south; mountains of water piled up almost over their heads and then ducked and disappeared under the keel of their stanch little craft.

Not a star could be seen. Nothing could be seen; and the captain had only his ears and his instinct to guide him in handling the boat.

Whenever one member of the party had occasion to speak to another, he had to place both hands to his mouth and shout with all his strength—and even then the words were often carried away out of hearing, by the fierceness of the gale.

But Capt. Bill was a sailor who was born to the sea. He often boasted that he had never in all his life spent more than a week at a time ashore, save on the one occasion when he had been held captive and made to perform the work of a slave, in the far interior of China.*

And if Nick Carter and his assistant were not born

*See No. 404, NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "The Trail of the Vampire."

to the sea, they loved it none the less—and they were none the less at home upon its bosom.

And so we find the three of them tossing about on the raging sound, in the twenty-four-foot sloop *Vulture*, in the middle of a tempestuous night when the darkness was so intense that they could not see the forms of one another where they sat not more than three or four feet apart in the cockpit.

Nick and Chick were quite close together on the windward side; one held the main sheet, and the other the jib sheet; and the captain was aft at the tiller.

"Set a vulture to catch a vampire, Nick," said Chick, after another short silence.

"Ay," replied Jones, catching the remark from the wings of the gale, "but blow me if I haven't always heard that vultures always go by eyesight, and a ferret couldn't see anything this kind of a night. We might as well all be blindfolded."

"I think the sloop is well named, nevertheless," remarked Nick. "We will catch the vampire, and all his followers, before we are through with this job."

"Unless they happen to turn the thing about and catch us," said Bill Jones, grimly.

"And what then?" asked Chick, smiling through the darkness, although he well knew that his face could not be seen. "What then, Bill?"

"Why, then they will—they won't do a thing to us," responded Bill.

"Right you are, captain," said Nick. "They won't do a thing to us; for they won't get an opportunity. I wish, Bill, that you had as much courage in this affair as you have in other things you undertake."

"Courage," said Bill. "Ain't I got courage, Mr. Carter?"

"I think you are a little doubtful about it just now, Bill."

"Ain't I here?"

"You certainly are."

"Well, ain't I goin' to stay?"

"You are—unless you walk ashore, and you would find the going a trifle hilly about now, eh, Bill?"

"Do you think I'd walk ashore if I could—and leave you here?"

"No; but all the same, confess that you are a little in awe of the captain of the *Vampire* and his mysterious crew."

"Well, sir, I can't say as I know exactly what that word awe means, but if it happens to mean fear, it don't apply to me, nohow. If it means that I know what we are up against, and can tell you pretty near what will happen if they happen to turn the tables on us and get us by the boards—well, anyhow, I ain't a-turnin' back, and I don't want you to think that of Bill Jones, ever."

"No, no, Bill; I do not. I was only teasing. I would rather have you with me on this little cruise than the whole police force of New York City."

"Humph!" said Bill, somewhat mollified. "It wouldn't take that fraternity long to swamp this craft. All the same, Mr. Carter, if you don't mind, I'd like to ask a question or two."

"Ask them, Bill."

"What do you expect to accomplish by being out here to-night?"

"I can't answer that question before morning, Bill."

"You don't expect to see the *Vampire*, do you, when you can't see me, sittin' not more than a fathom away from you?"

"No; not unless they show a light."

"Which they ain't likely to do. You don't expect to be able to board 'em in this gale, and with this sea a runnin', do you?"

"Not unless they run us down and we are compelled to do so in order to save our lives."

"Which they are likely to do. You don't expect to be able to chase 'em, do you, when it's so infernally

dark you can't see 'em, and they are in a craft which can run around and round this here one, hey?"

"That is just what I expect to do, Bill."

"Jee-ru-sa-lum Ma-grun-dy! How?"

"Didn't you tell me, Bill, that this was just the sort of night they would select to make their landing?"

"Ay, ay, sir; I did."

"Do you think they can see in the dark any better than we can?"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, I do."

"All the same, you are a good sailor; and do you think, no matter how well you might know this offing and this coast, that you could run a vessel of any description into the harbor if there was not a light to be seen?"

"No, sir."

"Well, they aren't going to make for the regular harbor, or direct themselves by the regular lights, are they?"

"I shouldn't suppose they would, sir."

"Then, first, isn't it up to them to let their friends on the shore know that they are lying off here, waiting?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"And in order to do that, haven't they got to burn some sort of a light to warn their friends of their presence?"

"Well, sir, if they was like human sailors and had to depend upon——"

"Come! None of that, Bill; answer me, for they are human sailors, no matter what you may think. Now, if they burn a light, won't it be answered from the shore?"

"I should suppose so, sir—if they burned one."

"Well, Bill, that is what I expect to accomplish by being off this shore to-night. Do you understand me now?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"I expect them to burn a light, and, if they do that, I will see it. If they burn a light, it will be answered from the shore, and I will see that, too. If I see it, we will follow it, even if it takes us on the rocks and we have to swim for it——"

"Which it will do, as sure as you're born, sir."

"And we will get close enough so that we will know something of the locality."

"Humph!" said Bill, and lapsed into silence; but after a moment he spoke again.

"Mr. Carter," he asked, "did you ever happen to hear of them lights what's called Syreens—maybe I don't pronounce it right, but I calls it Syreens. Did you ever hear of 'em?"

"Often."

"Maybe there's more'n one coast where they hang out."

"Hush!" warned Chick. And then, an instant later, he cried out:

"Hard over, Bill! Hard over for your life! They are right upon us!"

The warning came not an instant too soon, and Bill Jones, always alert, even when he was grumbling the most, jammed his helm to leeward with all his might.

At the same instant, even blacker than the surrounding darkness, and accompanied by a noise like the hissing of a mammoth serpent, a huge body loomed over them; they felt the rush of something passing, and then a slight jar which told them that, whatever it was, it had passed so close that it had actually grazed their side, and so quickly that, notwithstanding the fierceness of the gale, the contact had been a touch and nothing more.

But Nick Carter knew that the *Vampire* had passed them, by less than the breadth of a hair, and that now the moment of real danger was at hand.

CHAPTER II.

THE VAMPIRE KING; AND THE LEAP FOR LIFE.

"Might have boarded 'em like a shot, if we had only know'd it!" growled Bill, all his courage having returned with the sight of something tangible—if one might call that fleeting view a sight.

"Hush!" commanded Nick, sternly.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Hold the *Vulture* where she is, if you can."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"The *Vampire* cannot go far at that gait without running into the shore, or laying-to."

"Ay, ay, sir; right you be. I ain't got no grubs eating at my vitals now, sir. If you order us to run in, run in it is."

"Wait," said Nick. "There should be a rocket or something within the next—— Ah!"

It was not a rocket which caused the sudden termination of his remarks, but a flood of red light which seemed to burst out of the sea within an eighth of a mile of them; to loom for one instant out of the darkness as if Neptune were lighting his pipe for a smoke, and then to disappear as suddenly as it came, leaving no trace of where it had showed, and having revealed nothing save the light itself, by its short brilliancy.

The three pairs of eyes aboard the sloop were now fixed anxiously upon the shore—or, rather, upon that portion of the darkness where all knew that the shore should be; but though they waited second after second, and in moments like those seconds seem like minutes, nothing showed.

The sloop was pitching heavily, held as she was with just sufficient wind in her sail to give her steerage way.

"I ain't seen no light from the shore, Mr. Car——" began Bill; but he paused open-mouthed in the middle of his remark, for, suddenly, directly on their star-

board beam, and so close to them that the end of a ninety-foot heaving line might almost have been flung into it, the light appeared again.

It was not red this time, but blue and ghastly and unreal.

It was not brilliant, as when it had showed red, but dim and uncertain; and it came and went so quickly that if it had not been for what it revealed to the watching eyes, they might scarcely have believed that they saw it at all.

But the revelation it afforded them made old Bill Jones' teeth chatter in spite of himself, for in that dim radiance there glimmered before them, like a picture that is thrown upon a canvas by a magic lantern, the amidships—that part of the deck between the two masts—of a long, low, rakish, two-masted vessel of the schooner type, save that the masts were dressed in lanteen sails, closely reefed.

In that brief glance of her that was afforded them, they could not obtain a view of her entire length. The bow was missing beyond the circle of unearthly light to their left, and the stern disappeared into the darkness at the right.

But they could see the masts and the space between the masts. They could see the ribbed, lanteen sails lying against the masts, where they had been hauled a-back while the vessel was held up into the wind—and they could see a dozen or more dusky forms clinging to the rigging, to the shrouds and to the life-lines.

But, more than all, in the very center of that strange glow of pale-blue light, with its arms upraised as if in benediction upon the land he was approaching, stood the figure of a man—if, indeed, it were a man.

He seemed in that light to be almost colossal in height—to tower eight feet or more among the puny tribe of figures which surrounded him; and the flowing robe he wore, which might really have been any color at all, but which looked, like everything else,

deathly blue in that sudden illumination, were tossed out on either side of him so that they looked wonderfully like the wings of a huge bat.

Nor did the illusion end here, for the head was not the head of a man at all. It was the head of an imp—or of a bat, also—and even from that distance the watchers could see two glowing sparks of fire underneath the pointed ears, and they could see the long, hooked beak which extended from where the nostrils and the jaws should have been.

In a word, save for the long, tightly clothed legs which formed the only human aspect of the apparition, the entire illusion was that of a huge bat with its wings and claws extended toward the shore.

And the pale-blue light, which appeared and disappeared almost in the instant, gave to it all a deathly gravity, a weirdness, which is indescribable.

Then darkness again.

Nick Carter leaned forward quickly and grasped Bill Jones by the arm.

"Take this sheet rope, Bill, and give me the tiller," he commanded. "I'll be skipper for a while now. Watch the shore and stop your teeth chattering. They may hear you aboard the lugger."

Bill obeyed, too frightened to resist, even had he had the incentive to do so; and as they changed places the detective whispered in his ear:

"They were rounding to when they passed us, otherwise they would have run us down."

"Did you see it?" asked Bill, heedless of everything but the uncanny figure he had seen on the deck of the strange craft.

"Yes," replied Nick. "I saw it."

"What was it, sir? What do you make it out?"

"A man, like we are; nothing more."

"Will you swear to that?"

"Sure, Bill."

"Then, for God's sake, sir, where did he get the

wings, and the claws, and the beak, and the fire in his eyes?"

"He made them. Hush! Watch the shore for the answering signal, and keep cool. Mind the main sheet, Bill."

"Ay, ay, sir. But, Lord save me, sir, if that wasn't the king vampire hisself, may I never see harbor again."

"You are not likely to unless you mind your eye and obey orders."

"Ay, ay, sir."

There were several seconds of silence after that, and then Bill, who among other things had served his day at whaling, cried out:

"There she blows!"

It was true.

Off toward the shore, or rather upon the shore directly landward from their position, and in quick succession appeared first a red light, like the one first shown from the lugger, and then a blue one, faint and almost indistinct, and yet plainly visible through the darkness.

"The shore signal," said Nick. "Haul taut on your sheet, Bill. Pick up the wind. That's it. Now, Chick; ease off a little on your jib. So. So. Good! Now, pay out a little, Bill. Give her all she'll take and stand up. That's the ticket."

The sloop, under the skillful management of the detective, laid down to her work like a thing of life.

For an instant, when her sails caught the full force of the gale, it seemed as if she would dive under the water, or that her sticks would be blown bodily out of her, but she righted and seemed to shake the weight of a heavy wave off her bows as a dog shakes spray from his mane when he emerges from the water.

And then, with the speed of an arrow, she darted forward, straight toward the spot where the mysterious lights had shown from the shore.

Had the lugger started forward at the same instant?

Was it likely that the two vessels were running in parallel lines toward that given point? And was it not likely that they would crash together before the harbor could be obtained?

Chick, in the bow, clung calmly to his jib sheet, now hauling it toward him a trifle, and again paying out ever so little in order to get the very best of the wind.

Amidships, Bill Jones clung with all his strength to the main sheet, having taken two turns around a cleat in order to be able to hold it; and he was hanging on like grim death, with rigid jaws and staring eyes, frightened but unflinching.

And in the stern, with the tiller in his iron grasp, Nick Carter remained calm and unmoved in that howling wilderness of foam and spray, guiding the flying craft with all the skill he possessed, straight to the mark he had selected, never faltering, never flinching, and yet fully realizing that at any instant they might come in contact with the rocks and be hurled among the tossing breakers, to again be dashed, torn, and bleeding, and doubtless dead, upon the beach at the very feet of the goal he sought to accomplish.

As if to add to the extremity of the moment, the storm almost redoubled its fury at the very instant when the signal lights showed from the shore.

The mast of the sloop bent like a reed before the gale, and the shrouds which held it in place groaned and snapped, giving a thousand warnings of the strain that was put upon them, as if in protest—or defiance.

"Keep your eyes to starboard, Chick, and watch for the lugger; it is possible that you may be able to see her," ordered Nick. "I must watch my bearing ahead or lose all I have gained."

"Ay, ay," called Chick, in reply; and then, as the jib was working perfectly, he made the sheet fast around a cleat and devoted all his attention to carrying out the last order of his chief.

When the race for the shore began, Nick Carter calculated that they were about two and a half miles off shore, and he knew that the distance, at the rate of speed they were going, would be covered in a very short space of time.

That time, he had figured, he thought, to a nicety, and he believed he ought to know about the moment when to bring the *Vulture* about and hold her up into the wind while he made preparations for his bearings, for use the following day.

Suddenly, just as Nick believed that the crucial moment had arrived—just as he was on the point of giving the order to come about, Chick uttered a cry of warning.

"Port, Nick! Port!" he yelled.

Then, as Nick threw the helm over in obedience to that command, the two vessels came together with a crash which resounded above the fury of the gale; and as the little sloop was ground down and forced almost under the water, a chorus of shouts came out of the darkness from the other craft.

Then, as the sloop was borne under—as the mast went by the boards, there came another instantaneous flash of light from the lugger's deck, and in that flash, as Nick Carter was thrown into the boiling sea, he saw Chick take a flying leap through the air toward the deck of the vessel that had run them down.

CHAPTER III.

THAT TERRIBLE CHINESE WORD.

It must not be supposed that the great detective, with his assistant and Capt. Bill Jones, had undertaken any such arduous task as that described in the preceding chapters, without providing themselves thoroughly against every emergency which could be foreseen.

Nick realized, before he went aboard the sloop for that trip, that there was little doubt that one or all of

them would be cast into the sea before the night was over, and plans had been made in accordance with that idea.

Underneath the clothing worn by each of the men, they were swathed in life preservers.

Not the ordinary, clumsy kind, but something of Nick's own devising and which might be likened, better than anything else, to the famous Paul Boynton suits.

They were less complete, of course, and, therefore, less cumbersome, but, nevertheless, with one of them upon his person, the detective felt that no amount of tossing about in the waves of the storm could place him in any immediate danger of drowning.

Of course, these suits were not made of armor. They could not withstand pounding against rocks and reefs; but the wearers of them relied upon their own strong arms to defend them from such a contingency.

The detective's purpose in driving toward the shore as he did, in the height of that terrific storm, was mainly to locate the spot where the mysterious vessel, known vaguely as the *Vampire*, was supposed to land and disappear.

The phrase, "supposed to land and disappear" is used wisely, for it was not until after Nick Carter had captured and utterly routed the terrible Demons of the Night,* that either he or others had credited the conflicting reports which had from time to time reached the authorities concerning the lugger, of such phantom-like proclivities, of which we have already had a glimpse.

But from one of that captured lot, a half confession had been extorted, which tended to prove that the rumors along the coast, concerning this strange vessel, were only too well founded.

The first appraisal which the detective had of this fact.

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 405, "The Demons of the Night."

or of anything concerning it at all, was when he was called to the office of the Collector of the Port of New York for a consultation with that official.

This had happened three days after he had closed the case of the Demons, and also just three days before the happening of the events recorded in the preceding chapters.

Upon arriving at the office of the collector, Nick had discovered there, awaiting him in company with that gentleman, one of the special secret service officers of the Treasury Department of the United States.

"Be seated, Mr. Carter," said the collector, when the detective entered; "but first let me make you acquainted with Mr. Tuxedo. But, of course, you and Dan Tuxedo are known to each other?"

"Yes, we have met before," assented both men.

"Well," continued the collector, "Tuxedo has been sent here about a little matter of smuggling, and, after a short consultation together, we have decided to place the matter entirely in your hands—if you will take it."

"Certainly I will take it," replied Nick; "and, if you are ready to begin at once, so am I, gentlemen."

"It is a case of opium smuggling, chiefly," continued the collector, "but, of course, there are other commodities which come in with the opium. In fact, it is because we know that there are other things with the opium—or, rather, that there is opium with the other commodities, that we are so certain that the point to look for the smugglers is somewhere directly around or immediately adjacent to the port of New York.

"Now, you have just had a case which suggests that you might be in line for ferreting out the hidden nest of these fellows who have puzzled us so long, for I do not hesitate to tell you that we have been several years at work on this case, and that we are to-day no nearer a solution of it than we were when we began."

"Wait a moment, collector, and let me talk," suggested Tuxedo.

"Gladly, Dan. Go ahead."

Then it was that Dan Tuxedo turned to Nick and gave him the story without circumlocution.

"We always connect smuggled opium with Chinamen," he said.

"Naturally," assented Nick.

"Well, in this case, in addition to the usual inference, there is the fact that the other smuggled goods, to which the collector has referred as commodities, are also of Chinese origin, so you see we have pretty good reason to believe that a syndicate of Chinamen is back of this affair."

"Quite so."

"Only the other day you rooted out the so-called Demons of the Night."

"Yes."

"Having this case in charge, it occurred to me that if I could make one of those fellows you wounded talk, I might pick up a point or two worth having."

"I should say that it was quite possible."

"It even occurred to me that you might have happened upon the very nest of smugglers I was looking for."

"I should not be surprised if there were connection between the two affairs," said Nick. "I saw no evidences of it; but then, I was not looking for that sort of thing, you know."

"Yes, I know. Well, I called upon the inspector at headquarters, and he very gladly consented to assist me, so we had one of your wounded fellows up for what he calls the third degree."

"And he told you the whole story, I suppose," said Nick, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Hardly that," said Tuxedo, drily. "When did you ever hear of a Chinaman telling the entire story of anything?"

"Never, in my experience."

"Nor I, in mine. But we did glean one fact."

"Only one?"

"Just one; but it was the one point which I wished to clear, and it is this: Did you ever happen to hear of a mysterious, phantom-like vessel around the sound, called the *Vampire*?"

"Can't say that I ever did," replied Nick. "I've heard a lot about vampires of late—more, in fact, than I ever expected to hear in the entire course of my life, but a ship of that name beats me."

"Well, there is one; and what is more, there have been rumors of her existence along the coast of Long Island and Connecticut, for the last five years."

"Well?" said the detective.

"Mind you, I have been on this case for five years. During that time I have searched the two coasts I have named, from end to end—with no results."

"Then, Dan, if you could get no trace of them during five years, I don't know how you expect me to do it for you."

"Wait, Nick. I have got into my dotage on this particular case. I doubt if I would recognize a symptom of smuggling along that coast now, if I should see one."

"Nonsense, Dan."

"I have arrived at the point where I am constantly threshing over old straw. I'm no good whatever, anymore, on this particular case, save to give you the benefit of what experience I have had."

"All right, old man. I'll help you out. Now about this phantom ship; what of her?"

"As I say, I have heard about her everywhere I have been, during the last five years. I doubt if there is a fisherman along either side of the sound, or a farmer who lives near the shore of the sound on either side, who has not at some time seen her—or thinks he has, which is the same thing so far as I am concerned."

"Well, what of her?"

"I had clean made up my mind that there was nothing

of her at all until this fellow, whom the inspector and I put through the third, told me that there is such a vessel and that she is commanded by the vampire king. Now what do you think of that, Nick?"

The detective threw back his head and laughed aloud while Dan Tuxedo scowled at him.

"You appear to think it's mighty funny, Nick," he said, at last.

"I do, Dan. I wouldn't have laughed at you three days ago."

"Then why do you laugh now?"

"Simply because I was fooled myself, until three day ago. If it had not been for those same Demons of the Night, to whom you have referred, I should have gone down to my grave, wondering all the time about the Chinese idea of our word v-a-m-p-i-r-e. You may rest assured, Dan, that there is such a ship." Again Nick laughed.

"I am assured of it since I talked with that captured Demon."

"But you are not assured in the right way."

"How do you mean?"

"You think there is only one ship by that name, and that she is to be found off this coast engaged in the contraband trade."

"Well?"

"As a matter of fact, there are hundreds of ships by that name, and they are all over the world."

"What in blazes, Nick——"

"Hold on, now; don't get huffy. I was just as much puzzled as you were until I hit upon the solution of the problem, and quite by accident, I assure you."

"When you get to it, if you wouldn't mind telling me, what in the dev——"

"Dan, there is a word in the Chinese language—Heaven only knows how it is spelled, for I don't—but there is a word in Chinese which, when pronounced, sounds exactly like our word vampire, and I believe it

is the only word in their entire language wherein the letter R is known to exist."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Dan. "Is that true?"

"Quite true."

"What does it mean?"

"In a word, Dan, it means smuggler; but, like all Chinese character words, it comprehends a whole lot of other things with it. For example, your mere opium smuggler would not be a vampire, but if he happened to smuggle opium and other things for the purpose of concealing the fact that he also smuggled Chinese girls into the country to sell them to Chinamen here, for wives, then he would be a vampire. Do you understand? The Chinese word which sounds like our word vampire means merely a man—or a ship—who, while ostensibly an opium smuggler, is really an importer of Chinese women."

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed Dan.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PHANTOM SHIP.

"So, you see," continued Nick, after a pause during which they all laughed together, "the poor chap whom you put through the third degree really told you nothing at all. He merely admitted that he was brought here by a vampire, or on a vampire, what you will—unless, perhaps, he told you where he was landed."

"That is precisely what he did do."

"Now we are getting at it."

"He was landed not far from where you captured him—that is, not far from Hempstead Bay."

"So far, so good. Now; do you want me to take this case?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me about the particular ship you are talking about."

"All right. Suppose we call her the *Vampire*, for the sake of brevity."

"Good. And it is a name well applied, too, for the traffic in which she is doubtless engaged. What about her?"

"She has been seen off the coast of Long Island and Connecticut, from end to end, at intervals more or less frequent, for five years."

"You said that."

"The stories about her make almost a phantom of her, like the *Flying Dutchman*."

"Go ahead, Dan."

"Sometimes she has been seen moseying along at a comfortable rate of speed in an apparently dead calm, and, when fast sailing craft have put out to overhaul her, as has happened several times, she simply flies away from them and disappears, like you would blow out a candle."

"You don't believe that, do you, Dan?"

"I'll have to, if I believe any of the yarn at all."

"Well, go ahead."

"She is never seen in the daytime; always in the early dawn, or just at nightfall, or, as is more often the case, in the middle of the night, and in a storm."

"And then——"

"She is usually flying along, paying little or no attention to the storm at all, and she disappears in a cloud of steam or a smoke, or goes up to the moon, or does some such likely thing. Sometimes we hear of her enveloped in red fire—that is to say, burning up; then again she appears in another place, undergoing destruction in a mass of blue flame. Bah, Nick, the whole thing makes me tired!"

"I don't wonder," replied Nick, gravely, "and yet, I would not be surprised if it were all true."

"What's that?"

"I mean it. The more impossible these stories have

been made to appear, the more I should, in your case, be inclined to believe them."

"Are you guying me, Nick?"

"Certainly not."

"Then what do you mean?"

"Have you ever been duly impressed with the cunning of a Chinaman?"

"I don't know. I thought I had. Perhaps not."

"Don't you know that they can do all sorts of things with fire?"

"Yes; I've heard that they can give our friend Mr. Payne cards and spades in that line."

"And they can, too; and for that reason your stories of the red flame and the blue flame indicate the truth of the stories you have heard—possibly with some allowance for the excitement of the witness at the moment of beholding the strange craft."

"By Jove, Nick! I shouldn't wonder if you have hit upon the truth."

"If you mean that there is such a ship, I think I have."

"Well, what's to do next?"

"First, let us get the best we can out of what has been told to you."

"All right. Go ahead. You're the examiner."

"Off what part of the coast has she been oftenest reported to you during these five years?"

"That's hard to say. I couldn't tell you that."

"Well, where has the red and blue flame been oftenest seen?"

"I can answer that."

"Where, then?"

"Always, without exception, somewhere in the vicinity of Hempstead Bay."

"Good! Then we know to a certainty that she waits till she gets in the vicinity of that spot before she signals to her compatriots on shore."

"Sure thing! And to think that I never thought of that."

"You did not believe in the ship at all."

"Right you are; and I'll tell you why."

"Well, why?"

"Chiefly, I think, that is after all the other outlandish things have been set aside, because of her outlandish rig."

"Ah! Now we are getting at the second point. What is that rig?"

"You can search me. I am no sailor. Something on the order of pictures I have seen in books, of Chinese junks, I think."

"Exactly."

"Nonsense, Nick, why exactly? I have caused inquiry to be made of every maritime exchange along our coasts, and there hasn't been a craft of her description spoken anywhere, in all that time."

"And yet you know that she appears in the sound at intervals; appears and disappears almost at will; that she has lateen sails—you did not say that, but that is what you meant, isn't it?"

"Yes; that is the word the fishermen have used in describing her. Lateen sails, and two masts."

"Very well, that she has lateen sails, two masts, burns red fire and blue fire, and—well, that is about all."

"I should think it was enough. What I want to know is, how do you account for the reason that she has never been reported off the coast anywhere?"

"For the simple reason that she does not go off the coast anywhere."

"I suppose you will suggest next, that she goes overland, across the Rockies."

"Hardly that."

"Where does she go, then? To the bottom, as some of my informants suggest?"

"Nor that, either."

"Well then, where does she go? How does she bring in her contraband goods and deposit them here, and be seen only in the night? You don't pretend to say that she can go to sea, and sail from here to China, lying by in the daytime and traveling only at night, like a man might do aland."

"No, Dan, I don't say that."

"Then what does she do?"

"She simply sails out of her secure harbor, somewhere in the vicinity of Hempstead Bay, at a given time, goes to sea, meets the steamship which is awaiting her at a given spot, and——"

"Geewhizz!"

"Isn't that about the size of it?"

"Sure thing. Funny I couldn't think of a simple thing like that."

"You didn't believe in her at all, that is why."

"Well, I believe in her now. Go on, Nick."

"There isn't much to go on about, is there?"

"Yes, a little. It is considerable distance from Hempstead Bay to the open sea, and a ship engaged with her in such traffic would hardly venture inside the sound."

"Why not? There are lots of tramp ships in the world whose owners, or captains, would not hesitate to make a contract with a Chinese vampire to receive his goods and deliver them at a certain spot at sea, provided he was well paid for it. You can always find somebody who is willing to do your dirty work, if you happen to have any to do."

"I guess that's so. But, suppose she had to go to sea; do you suppose that one of those lanteen-rigged affairs could go and come from Hempstead Bay between darkness and daylight?"

"No, I do not; but she could go in one night and return the next; and she could have a place out near the end of the island where she could safely lie by during the day without much danger of being seen; or, again, she could alter her rig during the day. It would not take much of a sailor to do that, in decent weather."

"All right, Nick. I'll admit the entire impeachment.

Now, the next thing is, how are we going to catch her?"

"By meeting her on her own stamping ground."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, by meeting her on a stormy night, at sea."

"But the devil himself could not catch her, according to the accounts I have heard."

"I can catch her, and I will catch her."

"How? Tell me how?"

"Well, I shall get a certain man I know, who happens to be idle at the present moment. I refer to a certain Capt. Bill Jones. He came here on a ship called the *Cameron Pride*, some time ago; and in that case I had in connection with the murders in Prospect Park,* he did me some good service. Bill Jones knows a Chinaman from his head to his heels, and he hates them like poison. He is also a good sailor. He is also fearless."

"A good man to have handy, Nick."

"He is that. What is more, I have made up my mind that all that Prospect Park business, which was never satisfactorily cleared up, and all that Demon of the Night business, also, were offshoots of this gang of vampires. I think by rooting out this nest you seek, we will not only be doing the government good service, but also serving humanity in general, for I think that through it we will get our hooks upon more dens of iniquity in the Chinatowns of New York and Brooklyn, than you can dream of."

"Right, Nick! So do I."

"I'll take the case and I'll begin now. You stay on tap so that I can get you, if I want you; and you, collector, be ready, if you please, to put the revenue cutters at my service."

"I'll place my entire force at your disposal, sir," replied the collector.

CHAPTER V.

THE MIDNIGHT WRECK.

And now, if you please, we will return to that midnight scene in Hempstead Bay, at the moment when

*See No. 404.

the sloop *Vulture* was run down by the lugger *Vampire*, and at the instant when the last signal light of the smuggler crew was flashed over the sea.

Nick Carter and Capt. Bill Jones were thrown into the foaming water in spite of all their efforts to save the little vessel from capsizing, and it will be remembered that as the detective went overboard, he saw, in that flash of light, the figure of his assistant as he leaped upward and outward toward the rigging of the lugger.

Then, instantly, all was blackness again.

It had been agreed between the three men, when they took passage together on the sloop, that if anything should happen to necessitate their taking to the water, each one should look out for himself, and that if each was fortunate enough to make a landing in safety, they were to meet at the summit of a certain small promontory whereon grew a huge pine tree.

This spot had been selected by them before darkness had settled over the surface of the sound, and each had taken his bearings carefully so that he would be enabled to find the place no matter how dark the night.

When Nick was thrown into the water, his whole thought was to protect his head against danger from contact with the rocks, lest he should be stunned, and so, drown, in spite of all the precautions he had taken to enable him to float indefinitely.

As luck would have it, however, he encountered no obstacles in his short journey shoreward.

The sea seemed to take especial delight in hurling him bodily over every sort of obstruction which might have been in his path, and almost before he was prepared for it, he shot upward on the top of a huge breaker, and was carried high, if not dry, and deposited safely upon a patch of soft and yielding sand.

Instantly he rose to his feet and listened.

Unfortunately he could not look around him, for the night was altogether too dark for that, but he could listen; and he bent his head and strained his ears to hear.

But the boom of the sea and the roaring of the storm, the swish of the rain and the resentful hissing of the

trees on the bank above and behind him, was all that he could hear.

"It seems incredible that the lugger should have escaped from all that turmoil," he mused, "and yet she must have done so; and that flash of light, which came just as we were capsizing, was evidently for the accommodation of their steersman, and was not made because of the collision with the sloop.

"I would not wonder," he continued, after a pause, "if the people on the lugger were totally unconscious of the fact that they had struck the sloop at all, or even that there was such a thing as another vessel anywhere near them.

"And Chick! By Jove! I wonder if he reached the lugger. If he did, I'll bet my life that he is with it still and that it will remain for him to solve this mystery, after all."

Again he listened intently for several minutes, but as he still heard nothing but the roaring of the storm and the booming of the sea, he began to divest himself of the unnecessary garments he wore—those which had been intended only for buoyancy—and having accomplished that and deposited them behind a bowlder, he produced his small electric searchlight and began an examination of his surroundings.

The little instrument, not larger in circumference than an ordinary candle and only ten inches in length, was provided with batteries which threw a light, small in diameter, to be sure, but so intense that for a distance of forty feet from him it revealed distinctly everything it touched.

He shot it from side to side and from point to point around him, like a huge firefly, and he speedily discovered that he was almost at the foot of the very bluff which had been selected for the meeting place in case of accident such as had happened.

Having made that discovery, he started forward, and was on the point of ascending the rocks in search of the tree behind which they were to meet, when, from the darkness to his right, he heard his name called, in a low tone.

Instantly he threw the light so that it struck the ground at his feet, and replied:

"All right, Bill. Come over here to me. Are you hurt?"

"Narry a hurt, sir," replied the captain, joining him. "I was lying on my back, trying my best to get my bearings, when I saw your light dancing around. At first I thought it was another o' them devil lights of the vampires, but then I made sure it was you, so I hailed."

"Quite right. Where did you come ashore?"

"Not six fathoms away from here, sir."

"Did you see or hear anything of the lugger?"

"Narry a hail; not one."

"What became of it?"

"Well, sir, if I should tell you what I honestly think about what became of that craft, you wouldn't take no stock in what I said, so what's the use of talking."

"You mean that you still believe that it is supernatural?"

"I mean that I think it went into harbor in the infernal regions, where it belongs."

"Nonsense, Bill!"

"Well, sir, that's my opinion. But I shipped for this cruise, and signed papers for the voyage, so, if you please, if the lugger takes us plumb to hades, I won't desert."

"That's the way to talk. Now, have you seen or heard anything of Chick?"

"Only what I saw when that devil's light flashed up, aboard the lugger."

"What did you see and hear, then?"

"The same as you did, I suppose, sir."

"Never mind; tell me what it was."

"I saw the young man leap for the deck of the lugger, and I saw him catch her by the taffrail and then swing loose, and it appeared to me as if he dropped into the sea again; but the light went out so quick, I won't be certain."

"We must make a search for him along the shore, Bill."

"Ay, ay, sir; but there is one thing you mustn't forget."

"What is that?"

"I said that Chick caught the lugger on the taffrail, didn't I?"

"Yes; what of it?"

"Only this. That lugger is a queer-built craft, if you happened to notice."

"I did not notice anything peculiar about her build."

"Well, most sailing craft has an overhanging stern; she has got what in these days of improvement is called a torpedo stern, though why she should have one is more than I can make out."

"What of it? And what has that to do with Chick?"

"Simply this: If he had to let go his hold on the rail and drop into the sea, he would drop just where he could catch the rudder chains, if he happened to think of it."

"I see what you mean, Bill."

"And, sir, if he did that, and managed to hang on, he would like enough go into port along with the craft he was clinging to."

"Sure he would."

"And, on the other hand, if he was walking around the shore near here, he would do just what I did; that is, he would see your lights and let out a hail, wouldn't he?"

"Yes."

"Then what's the use of searching along shore for him?"

"Because it is possible that he might have been hurt, and be unable to see or to hail us, as you put it."

"That's so, sir; but it ain't likely."

"Why not?"

"Well, we weren't hurt, were we?"

"No."

"I don't reckon that he is any more likely to get his head cracked than you or me, is he?"

"Possibly not."

"Nor half as likely. He's quicker than a cat and slipperier than an eel. He's all right."

"All the same I shall have a look for him."

"Suppose the vampires should see your light?"

"I don't care a rap—now—whether they see it or not."

"All right, sir. Heave ahead. I'm with you. Say, Mr. Carter?"

"Well?"

"I'm rather sorry about the *Vulture*."

"So am I, but that won't help the matter any. We'll probably find her bones along the beach here, somewhere."

"That is just what I'm driving at; I don't think we will."

"You don't, eh? Why not?"

"Because I think she went along with the lugger, into port."

"You think what?"

"I think she was sucked into the same hole that the lugger went into."

"Sit down here, Bill, and tell me what you mean."

"Well, sir, I mean that it's a sailor's custom to take note of your soundings when you make a new port. Now, I shot into this cove on the top of a wave, which carried me high and dry on shore and left me there, and it ain't no sort of sea that I ever saw what would do that, unless it was helped by some outside agency."

"You see, sir, when we came a-flying into this place, before the sloop went out from under us, the sea was a-booming and a-howling to beat the band, all along here—and now it is a-booming and howling just the same as it was then; but, sir, there was a space of a minute or two or three, or maybe more, for all I know, when something got in the way of that booming and howling."

"What in the world do you mean, Bill?"

"I mean that it seemed to me just as if something came down into the sea, and for the space of a short time sort of held the sea back. That wave that brought me into port after I left the deck of the sloop wasn't no breaker—it was a swell; that is to say, it was a breaker with the ginger taken out of it—just like you would see behind a small breakwater in a storm like this one. Then again, when the lugger hit us, I was sitting amidships, and a-lookin' aft, while you were lookin' for'ard, so you couldn't see what I did; but I'd stake my life that a great big section of that bluff fell over behind us when we passed it, and so shut off the

force of the sea. I saw it, sir, in that flash of light, and I'll bet a hundred dollars to a cent that when you find the sloop you'll find the lugger, and vicer versy; and I'll bet, moreover, that you won't find either of them, nor a stick of either of them, along this beach. They went into the same hole, Mr. Carter, and it's my opinion that the hole is mighty hot at the bottom, sir."

CHAPTER VI.

A MYSTERY OF THE SEA.

Nick was silent for several moments after the remarkable statement made by Bill Jones.

He recalled, also, that the wave which had taken him so safely to land had seemed to be suddenly bereft of its power, as if, as Bill expressed it, the ginger had been taken out of it.

But what could have taken the ginger out of it in the face of that storm?

The idea that a section of the cliff had momentarily fallen over into the sea, and so created a breakwater, was preposterous; and yet, now that he recalled the incidents of the moment, something certainly had taken the "ginger" out of the breakers.

He recalled also the immediate absence of all noise save that engendered by the storm, while his good sense told him that if the two vessels had been wrecked, or if either one of them had met the fate which had seemed inevitable, there would have sounded in his ears at that moment, above the booming of the surf, the grinding and crunching of timbers being torn apart.

"Perhaps, after all, there may be something in what Bill Jones says," he mused; but he did not express the thought aloud.

"Comê, Bill," he said. "We will make a search along the beach to see what we can find, anyhow."

"Ay, ay, sir; I'm ready; but you won't find anything at all, you mark my words."

And so, shooting the rays of his piercing light before him, Nick led the way back down the slope to the cove where they had landed so strangely.

He easily discovered the spot where he had come ashore; and Bill as easily found his.

Against the sky, which had now cleared somewhat, toward the sea, they could see the lofty outlines of the bluff they had passed in entering the little harbor.

The two vessels must have rounded that bluff side by side, and so close together that it seemed incredible that the collision had not occurred before it did.

Nick recalled now, that although it had seemed at the time as if the flashlight from the deck of the lugger and the collision had occurred at the same time, that in reality the flash must have happened an instant before the contact, and he concluded from that fact—as he had already decided from another one—that the flash was indeed a signal, and that it could have had no connection with the colliding of the two vessels.

"If that were the case," he argued, "the lugger, at the instant the flash occurred, was exactly in position for the happening of any event that had been anticipated by her commander, and if she were in such position, so was the sloop, for they were side by side—in fact, in actual contact.

"Now," he continued, in this train of thought, "I must not forget that the people on the lugger did not know that we were on the sound, looking for them. They did not know that the sloop existed at all. They were not looking for her, and they had not seen her.

"If they were not looking for her and had not seen her, they were not endeavoring to escape from her. They did not know that she was on the sound or in the bay at all until they touched sides.

"Good! Now, if the lugger was not trying to escape, what was she endeavoring to do? Why, to make her accustomed port, of course.

"It is a safe proposition that no sailor would deliberately head his craft, on such a night as this one and in such a storm, directly for the face of a huge bluff, unless he knew mighty well where he was steering and where he would bring up.

"He wouldn't run in toward shore before a gale like this, at the rate of thirty or forty knots an hour, without knowing something about what he was up against.

"He wouldn't lay offshore while he burned two lights at intervals apart, and wait then for answering lights from the shore unless he knew where he was going.

"It all resolves itself to the same thing, which is that the lugger was well handled, that her captain knew exactly where to steer, and that there is somewhere near here a cleverly concealed harbor into which, by some artificial means, he is enabled to steer, even in the darkest of nights and through the worst of storms.

"It seems incredible, and if I had not encountered it, I would not believe it for an instant, but I cannot refuse to believe the evidence of my own senses.

"Bill is right about one thing: If the lugger made port in safety, the sloop must have gone into the same port, even if she went into it bottom up."

Aloud he said:

"Come along, Bill; we will make a search anyway."

They turned to the right at first, traveling toward the bluff, and so they skirted the beach in that direction until they had traveled far enough so that they knew positively that if any wreckage had drifted ashore in that direction, they must have discovered it; but they discovered none, nor any signs of such.

Then they returned to the spot where they began the search and traveled in the opposite direction, returning after half an hour, still unable to find any signs of lugger or sloop.

Nor was there anywhere any indication that Chick had landed or had floated ashore—and if he had been knocked on the head and drowned, Nick knew that his body would have drifted ashore long before this, supported as it was by the life preserver he wore.

During the entire search, Bill Jones indulged himself in frequent chuckling.

"There ain't no sort of use, sir," he said, at last. "You might search till doomsday and you won't find either sloop or lugger, save at the bottom of that hole I told you about."

"But where is Chick?"

"I reckon he caught onto that air taffrail and went down into the hole, too," replied Bill. "Leastwise, that's the only way I can read my log."

"We haven't been to the pine tree yet, where we agreed to meet," said Nick. "We will go there now and wait for daylight. It is possible that he might be there waiting for us."

"You don't really believe that, do you, Mr. Carter?"

"No, I do not."

"No more do I."

And Chick was not there.

They fixed themselves as comfortably as they could at the foot of the huge tree, and composed themselves to await the approach of daylight.

With the first break of dawn, Nick was upon his feet again, while Bill stood up and yawned peacefully. He had slept like a baby, for, since his captivity in the middle of Asia, all places were much the same to him when it came to a question of sleep.

"What's the course for the morning, sir?" he asked.

"I hardly know, Bill," replied Nick. "This is a new one on me. I have been up against all sorts of propositions until I struck this one; but I will confess that this has me staggered."

"You ain't ever been up against Chinamen much, I reckon, Mr. Carter."

"Oh, yes, I have. I have been all over their country. I speak their language and several of their dialects. I have disguised myself as a Chinaman and penetrated into their secret meetings; I have——"

"But you ain't never lived with 'em and slept with 'em, and eat with 'em, and been their slave when they thought there was no hope in your heart that you would ever get away from them, and when they talked their secrets openly before you, have you?"

"No; not that, thank God!"

"Well, I have."

"I know you have, Bill."

"A Chinaman, Mr. Carter, is the most reserved cuss in the world."

"I don't doubt that."

"And he's the craftiest cuss, too."

"I don't doubt that, either."

"He knows how to wait better than any other creature this side of kingdom come, and he will figure the farthest ahead of any sixteen thousand lubbers on sea or land."

"I believe that is true, too."

"Why, sir, talk about a Russian knowing how to

wait, and how to figure ahead—he's a joke to a rich Chinaman."

"What are you driving at, Bill?"

"I'll tell you, sir, in a minute, if you'll jest give me time and let me do it in my own way."

"All right. Take your time. As far as I can see at the present moment, time is the one thing with which we are well supplied."

"Do you remember what you said that Dan Tuxedo told you?"

"Yes."

"About his having been five years or more on this job?"

"Yes."

"And never in all that time gettin' a hair of real knowledge about the doin's of the fellers he was after?"

"Yes."

"Well, I take it that Dan Tuxedo's no fool, is he?"

"Not by any means. He is an unusually good officer."

"Only in this case he was up against an outfit that was smarter than he was; eh?"

"That's about the size of it."

"Well, he was sent out by the government, five years ago, to trail down this gang of vampires, wasn't he?"

"He certainly was."

"Then, knowing a Chinaman as I do, it stands to reason that if the government didn't get onto what was happening until five years ago, you can bet your boots that the same thing had already been goin' on fifteen or twenty years—that is to say, that at least the Chinamen had been preparing for it."

"I don't think that I quite follow you, Bill."

"Well, let's suppose a case. Mind, I don't say that I'm right, but I'll bet a hammock that I am."

"Go ahead."

"Suppose, then, that, say twenty years ago, three rich Chinamen—I say three because that is the usual number of their partnerships—suppose then that three rich Chinamen got together and decided to go into the vampire business."

"Well?"

"One of 'em had been over here to this country and looked over the lay of the land, so to speak. We'll say he had hired a catboat or some sort of craft, and had studied the coast of this 'ere island from one end to the 'other, for the place he wanted for his operations; and, Mr. Carter, in studyin' this 'ere coast, he found this 'ere bluff that we're a-lookin' at now and wonderin' what's the matter with it."

"Go ahead, Bill. When you get through I shall advise that you go on the lecture stage."

"I don't know what that is, but if your makin' fun of me, I'll stop."

"I'm not Bill; really I'm not."

"Don't forgit that I'm only supposin' a case. In other words, I'm a-tellin' you how, in my opinion, a Chinaman would work this 'ere game if he had a chance."

"Go on, Bill."

"He lights onto this 'ere bluff, and he says to himself that it's jest the place he was a-lookin' for. He sees possibilities in it, and—he buys it."

"Eh?"

"That's what I said; he buys it; or if he don't buy it himself, he gets some unprincipled American to do it for him, and I reckon he wouldn't have to look far to do that if there was a promise of good and continued profit in the thing."

"Right you are, Bill."

"He stands up here by this big tree where we are, and he says to himself, that the little cove down there has deep water. He sees that it is about the shape of a clover leaf, with a fine hook of land puttin' out into the bay over there, jest enough to shelter it properly, providin' that the hook aforesaid were helped along a leetle, and made to grow."

"Look here, Bill——"

"Wait, sir, I ain't through yet."

"But you are talking nonsense."

"Maybe I be and maybe I ain't; but I'm a-tellin' you about something I know about in another part of the world—in China itself, in fact, where they hollowed out a whole cliff to make a temple. I think that there

bluff is hollow, Mr. Carter, and if you'll let me, I'll tell you why."

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT THE DRAGNET CAUGHT.

Nick Carter did not immediately reply.

He fixed his eyes long and meditatively upon the contour of the bluff in question, now gradually becoming clearer to view in the advancing daylight.

"It doesn't look hollow, Bill," he said, musingly, at last. "As far as I can see it looks quite natural."

"Well, sir, and why shouldn't it, if it was dug away and fixed up twenty-five years ago, or more?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"It stands to reason, sir, that if that hull bluff was dug away a quarter of a century ago, and that if then a covering was put onto it, and that covering was covered up with eight or ten feet or more of good dirt, and if then trees were planted on it, and other things, that in that length of time the trees would grow, and so would the other things, so that by this time it would be a dam—a mighty poor bluff if it couldn't look natural like; eh, sir?"

"Go ahead, Bill; you have certainly interested me."

"And if the bluff ain't hollow, where did the sleep and the lugger go to?"

"They couldn't fly, could they, Bill?"

"No, sir; I ain't never seen any that could, only when their keels was a-restin' on the bosom of the deep, so to speak. Now to return."

"All right, Bill."

"As I was a-sayin', he sees mighty possibilities for all time to come, in this same bluff, providin' that hook out there is made to grow some for his purposes. He sees that he can establish a business which will not only make him rich, but which will make his descendants rich also—which fact, if you know anything about Chinamen, pleased him most, because it would make them same descendants worship their ancestors a leetle more—that is, him. Most every Chinaman is pretty deep in the ancestry business, if anybody should ask you."

"I understand that all right, Bill."

"He buys the bluff and the hook of land running out into the sea, and this land behind and whatever else he needs, and he sets to work. He imports on the dead quiet all the labor he wants, and he has slave coolies of his own and his partners in China. He has lots of time. He ain't in no sort of hurry."

"Naturally not if he began operations twenty or thirty years ago."

"I take it that people around these parts aren't as thick as they were along about 1870, or '75, be they?"

"I should say not."

"And that there weren't so many rich men a-buying up the land along here for summer homes and golf links?"

"Not quite, I think."

"And that if somebody chose to do a little digging along this coast, delving into this bluff, there wouldn't be so many curious eyes a-watchin' him as there would be now?"

"Certainly not."

"And that if there did happen to be anybody to ask questions, he'd 'a' been satisfied with almost any sort of answer. And I take it, also, that about that 'ere time, there weren't no restrictions about the importation of Chinese labor, to bother 'em, was there?"

"You are right about that, Bill."

"Well, don't you see that it would be an easy matter for him to bring a ship load of coolies or two ship loads for that matter, and to camp 'em in the woods back of here?"

"Sure."

"Now, how do you suppose that temple of Solomon was built? And them pyramids? Why, they was built with hands, to be sure, and with lots of hands—millions of them; and I'll tell you that if a rich Chinese mandarin wanted to dig up Manhattan Island, and nobody tried to stop him, he could set so many men to work on it, that all the railroads that run into New York couldn't carry away in a day the amount of dirt that them millions of coolies would shovel out in an hour; you hear me?"

"I do hear you, and it is good reasoning."

"Well, sir, that's my idea of the present situation.

I was perfectly willing to admit, last night, that the lugger was a phantom, but I am mighty cocksure that the sloop wasn't no phantom, and I know she couldn't fly away and leave no trace."

"That is quite certain."

"I know that when I got out of her she was half full of water, and I am sailor enough to know that she was ballasted so that she couldn't sink to the bottom."

"No; she couldn't have sunk."

"Well, she ain't on the bottom, and she ain't on the beach; then where is she? She ain't in the air and she couldn't make an offing again, nohow, so where is she? Well, sir, there is only one place on top of earth where she could be at this minute, and that is, alongside of the lugger, inside that bluff, which is hollow."

"Bill, you haven't explained yet what you meant by saying that the hook out there was made to grow."

"Well, I meant this: In the building of the underground temple I know about in China, they had to build out into the sea, and there was no sea wall to protect them, so they manufactured a kind of a breakwater which looked like a natural hook of land, but which was in reality a thing which they could raise and lower at their wills. Don't you see?"

"I begin to; yes."

"When that light flashed up, I saw something come down behind us, and I know that the force of the sea was less in a minute than it was before. Since daylight has come, I have been taking my bearings pretty careful like, and I am willing to take my oath that we came into that cove through good deep water, exactly where that 'ere hook puts out into the bay, this morning."

Nick leaped to his feet.

"I see what you mean now, Bill," he exclaimed.

"Da ye?" asked Bill, with a grin.

"You mean that the hook is almost entirely artificial."

"Jest that, yes, sir."

"And that sixty or seventy feet of it, perhaps more than that even, can be raised and lowered at the will of the people who control it."

"Now you're gettin' there, Mr. Carter."

"That, doubtless, it is a long and arduous task to raise it in the air, doubtless consuming half the night or more."

"Sure, sir; and it wouldn't be done in the daytime, ever, because somebody would see it."

"I see now. When the lugger goes out on one of her expeditions, the work of raising that breakwater is begun, and by the time of her return it is high in the air, so that she can run under it. But, I say, Bill?"

"Well, sir?"

"I can see now that the flash of light from the deck of the lugger was to signal that she had passed under the breakwater, and was to tell them to drop it into the sea; that much is easy, but——"

"Well, what part of it is hard?"

"How did the men aboard of her know when they were under it? In that darkness, they could not see any more than we could. And what is more difficult to answer still, what was to prevent the lugger from dashing herself to pieces on the shore, going as she was at race-horse speed? What, in fact, did prevent both the lugger and the sloop from poking their noses high and dry on this beach?"

"Huh! You have thought of that, have you?"

"This minute."

"Well, I thought of it as soon as I struck the sand last night. I expected 'em both to be on top of me, and it is all as simple as the nose on your face."

"It may be; but I will confess that I do not see it."

"Well, sir, the same thing which prevented them two vessels from smashing themselves onto the beach last night, was the thing which told the captain of the lugger when to flash his light; and the same thing which told him to do that, and which kept the sloop and the lugger from beaching, was the thing which drewed them both through an open door into that hollow bluff; and—well, any fool could sail into that port in a storm, if he had them appliances, and nobody on earth could do it if he didn't have 'em. But they caught more than they bargained for in their dragnet last night; eh?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GREATEST PERIL OF HIS LIFE.*

It will be remembered that it was Chick who first discovered the hulk of the lugger as it hove up against the sloop, threatening to swamp her, as indeed it did do.

It must also be understood that there was no time in which to think, to plan, or to consider.

There was plainly only one thing for Chickering Carter to do, and that was to act.

He acted upon the impulse which came to him in that instant when he realized that they were to be run down—that the sloop was to be capsized, and that the three occupants of the *Vulture* must take their chances of life in the boiling swirl of water between them and the shore—and there was no way of determining then how far distant that shore was, or might be.

As has already been described, he leaped upward and outward toward the lugger, which loomed over him, seemingly as big as a mountain.

Already she was gliding past—or seemed to be. Already the capsizing sloop was taking in barrels of water—and so Chick leaped.

The blinding flash of light came at that instant, and by its aid Chick discovered two things.

The first was, that the rail of the lugger was within easy distance for him to seize upon; and the other was, that there was not a man upon the deck of the lugger whose face was turned toward the sloop; the attention of all seemed to be centered upon something else, and although the men aboard of the lateen-sailed craft must have been aware of the fact that the side of their vessel had scraped against some obstruction, not one of them turned his head during that flash—not one of them seemed to be aware of the fact that there was life of any kind near them, save upon their own decks.

Chick's grasp did not slip from the rail, as Bill Jones had supposed. He clung there for the fraction of an instant, and had drawn himself up so that he was in the act of raising himself over it, when suddenly the

*The experiences of Chickering Carter must, for the sake of the story, be related in the third person, and the indulgence of the reader is hoped for.—EDITOR.

lugger seemed to be pulled up with a jerk, as if she had collided with some soft, spongy matter which brought her to a halt much as an air cushion will catch and stop a falling elevator.

The force of the impact was so unexpected and so great that Chick was thrown forward at full length upon the deck, and then, when he would have scrambled to his feet, he found himself half smothered in a cloud of falling canvas, and in an instant more a great weight lay upon him and across him, so that he knew that the masts of the lugger were down and that he was himself underneath the mainsail with the weight of the mainmast resting upon it, and therefore upon him.

Fortunately, however, the after-rail caught the full weight of the mast, so that in reality it rested rather lightly upon Chick, and in a moment more he was able to wriggle away from it, and thus to be able to breathe.

His first idea was that the lugger had been wrecked, but a moment's experience convinced him that this was not true, for he could not deny that everything above and around him appeared to be moving with the precision and regularity of clockwork.

There was a hoarse and guttural order or two given in the Chinese tongue, which he perfectly understood, and then it seemed to him as if the vessel turned upon her keel, and glided along as if following some irresistible impulse, such as might be induced by contact with a whirlpool.

He remembered his bearings well enough to know that the lugger was slowly but surely turning to port—that is, to the left.

But what could have turned her? Why did she not at once collide pell mell with the shore or dash into the breakers which surrounded that part of the shore?

Then he noticed that there was some undue excitement on the deck, as if something had happened which was not expected, and he heard several shouts which, owing to the thickness of the canvas which was heaped above him, he could not understand.

Determined at all hazards to know what was taking place, he wriggled straight aft along the pressure of the mast, until finally he reached the rail to which he

had clung when he leaped upon the lugger and from which he had been precipitated upon the deck to be in turn buried under the mainsail.

From there, it was the work of seconds only to so clear himself from the canvas that he was able to peer out.

The darkness was still so intense that he could see nothing; but he could hear; and fortunately he could also understand.

A few exclamations which came to him through the darkness sufficed to acquaint him with the cause of the excitement.

The men on board the lugger had discovered that they were dragging the wreck of another craft with them. He even heard one of them suggest, evidently to the captain, that some effort be made to cast the impediment loose from the lugger's side; and he heard the stern order of the captain to leave things as they were and to wait until they were inside.

"Inside!" thought Chick. "Inside what? Inside where?"

He noticed also that the sea seemed not so fiercely violent. The waves seemed stiller; and then, above the roar of the storm, which still raged, he could plainly hear the click-click-click of a windlass, seeming to come to him as from a distance, and also—strangely enough—from a hollow place.

Whatever had happened, Chick was now assured that the lugger had, in some miraculous fashion, escaped the fury of the gale.

She seemed indeed to have been already moored somehow, and he could have sworn that she was being warped into some sort of a haven by the use of windlasses.

He puzzled his brain to recall how this could possibly be the case.

He had that very day, in company with Nick and with Capt. Bill Jones, inspected thoroughly that portion of the coast, and he could not remember a spot along its length where a vessel of the size of the lugger could have sought a safe refuge from such a storm.

The only place he could recall which was at all likely under any circumstances, was the little cove underneath

the great pine tree where he had agreed to meet the others of his party in case they were wrecked; but even as he thought of it, he realized that the clover-leaf shaped cove could not afford a continued refuge from such a storm as this one.

Nevertheless the lugger was moving under him.

She was moving bow first, too, and had turned half about. He was sure of that from the direction of the wind, which now struck them on the beam instead of astern as it had done when they drove in together toward the beach.

All the time, too, the water was becoming stiller; and then, as though the gale had died out with the same suddenness with which one extinguishes a candle, there was no more of it.

If blacker darkness could be possible, he knew that they had entered into it; and there came into his nostrils the odor of moist rocks and dripping herbs, which is unmistakable to one who is familiar with it.

The tossing of the lugger upon the water had now ceased altogether, also. There was still the same slow, gliding motion ahead, and the same scraping sound of the hulk of the sloop against the side, but there was no swell in the sea—and there was no wind.

So engrossed was he in his effort to decide what had happened and what was still happening, that he rose from his half concealment beneath the sail and stepped boldly forth into the utter darkness.

Even as he did so, he heard a loud grating noise behind him, as if something were sliding down inside grooves into the water; and off at the right and at the left there came to him the sound of clanking chains, and the unmistakable noise made by turning cranks.

Then, from behind whence came the grating noise, there was a loud and sullen splash of the water, and then—

As if that splash were a signal of some sort, the whole place in which they were became suddenly, and in contrast with the utter darkness of a moment since, brilliantly illuminated.

In that flash of illumination, Chick saw, and understood.

He saw that he was standing at the uttermost stern

of the lugger, whereon the masts and sails had somehow been thrown to the deck together; he saw that lugger and sloop had somehow been drawn into an immense, cavern-like place, and he saw pig-tailed Chinamen rushing hither and thither upon the deck of the lugger and upon the wharf which surrounded the basin into which she had been drawn; he saw that the lights which had so suddenly flashed upon the darkness proceeded from half a dozen gasoline burners placed at intervals around the place, and he realized that in some inexplicable manner, the lugger, with her impediment, the wreck of the sloop, had been drawn directly through the face of the cliff into a hand-made cavern as large as the inside of an ordinary cathedral and shaped much the same, save that it was by no means so high.

In that brief glance he realized that he was in a predicament.

There he stood in full view of the entire throng—and there were many of them—if one should chance to look that way.

Instantly he dropped upon his face on the deck, and with all the activity he could master wriggled again underneath the canvas of the sail.

But even as he ensconced himself in that hiding place, he realized that it would offer a place of concealment for a very short period only, for it stood to reason that the first duty of the sailors, now that their ship was safely in port, would be to care for their sails.

"I cannot hide aboard this craft, that's certain," he mused, as soon as he was again under the sail; "and I can't go ashore. Plainly, there is only one thing for me to do, and that is to take to the water, and trust to luck not to be discovered."

On the side of the mast opposite him, the fallen sail reached clear to the rail, and he deplored the fact that he had not wriggled from under the mast on that side instead of this one, for it was manifestly impossible for him to crawl back again.

He was not given much time for cogitation, however, for as he was on the point of deciding that he would make a run for it, and leap into the water over the side,

trusting to luck not to be seen, many of the sailors rushed aft and began to work upon the sail.

He knew then that there was only a moment between him and discovery.

Until that instant he had not thought of his weapons, but now he began to search for them.

Never before in his experience had he been out on "business" when his weapons had not been placed so that they were ready at hand; but on this trip they had not considered at all the possibility of encountering anybody worthy of fighting—at least, not without ample time for preparation.

As a consequence of this, his tarpaulins were buttoned tightly around him, and his faithful pistols were for the moment out of his reach.

With a desperate effort he sought to tear the oiled-skin coat loose from its fastenings, but in the position in which he was lying that was impossible, and realizing that he must at all hazards possess himself of his weapons, he boldly raised himself upon his knees under the sail in an effort to get at them.

Even as he so raised himself, the sail was pulled aside and Chick was revealed, kneeling upon the deck, in full view of every Chinaman in the hollow bluff.

He started to his feet with an effort, and then indeed he did tear the oiled-skin coat open; but even as he reached for his pistols, he realized that resistance would be futile, and could only be fatal.

But that thought was not all that arrested his hands. Utter amazement had much to do with his lack of action, or rather with his failure to act.

Standing before him, robed in a gown of many colors, now, to be sure, soiled and wet with the storm outside, was the figure of an enormous Chinaman, scowling down upon him.

The giant's arms were folded, but he held in one of his hands the mask he must have worn when he stood upon the deck of his lugger outside and held his arms extended in that flash of blue light, when he had looked so much like a mammoth vampire.

Chick could understand how this man, with his arms outstretched, and with the beak-faced mask upon his head, would give the impression of a giant bat.

He was looking down upon Chick with scowling brow, while grouped around him, eagerly and yet silently in the background, were a score of the sailors of the lugger; and over beyond them, on the wharfs, where the news had already traveled that the wrecked sloop had contained a passenger who was now on the lugger, scores of other forms were hastening toward the scene.

"So," said the great Chinaman, in perfect English, "the storm wrecked you as well as your sloop. Where are your companions? Did any of them escape?"

"I wish I knew," replied Chick.

"Do you, indeed?" was the rejoinder. "Of what possible good would it be for you to know? Even if they live, they would never know your fate. It is to be regretted, sir, that the storm has brought you to us, for we have no joy in taking life. But as you have come, you can never return again. Your life is forfeited, and I must kill."

Then, calmly and deliberately, he drew a huge knife from his sash, and stepped slowly toward Chick.

CHAPTER IX.

AN AWFUL PREDICAMENT.

Chick had been threatened before in his life, many times, but never in quite such a solemn and phlegmatic a manner.

He discovered the instant he looked into the scowling face of the huge Chinaman that he could expect neither mercy nor pity from that quarter.

He was not surrounded, it will be remembered. He stood too near to the stern rail of the lugger for that; they could not get behind him.

But directly in front of him stood this giant Mongolian, while crowding behind him in turn came the constantly increasing horde of his followers.

And he was given no time in which to think; hardly time to act, encumbered as he was by the oiled-skin clothing he wore, and by the still more cumbersome life preserver which was under it.

The direct methods of the huge Chinaman were appalling—and yet, as events turned out, the best thing

that could have happened, for because of the very fact that he had no time to prepare himself, he did the very best thing that he could have done under the circumstances, which was simply to step backward and so precipitate himself into the water at the stern of the lugger.

If there had been any sort of opportunity for him to get at his weapons, he would have done so, but he fully realized that to make the attempt at that instant would simply have been to precipitate the attack of the giant, and so to have ended it all on the spot, probably with his own death.

In dressing for that dangerous sail on the sound, at the end of which a wreck was expected, if not invited, both the detectives had donned their rubber belts over their own clothing, and then, for the sake of comfort and warmth, had drawn the oiled skins over these.

Their weapons were of course in their regular clothing, under two layers of other, or extra, clothing after they were thus dressed.

But Chick had already unbuttoned the oiled-skin coat, and he had partly loosened the rubber belts when he was confronted by the Chinaman.

Then, when that personage, without hesitation or delay, proceeded to sentence him and to prepare to carry out the execution at once, the only course left for Chick to pursue was to do as he did, that is, to topple over backward into the water.

When he struck the water, he did not sink a great distance. The rubber belts he wore prevented that; but the fact that he did not had its advantages in that he was quickly to the surface, and had as quickly reached inside his clothing for his knife.

To open it with his teeth, holding it in one hand while with the other hand to tear at the rubber belts, were accomplished facts almost by the time he had touched the water, and then to slip out of the oilskin coat and to cut away the remaining parts of the belts was the work of almost no time at all.

But the Chinamen on the lugger were not idle either.

No sooner had he disappeared than they were after him; not the huge fellow, with the methodical death's head in his manner, but his horde of followers, one

after another, pell mell into the water, jumping and diving.

And they discovered when they reached the water—what?

Two sections of rubber belting, and an oilskin coat floating on the water.

The man they were after was nowhere to be seen.

The instant when Chick was free from the impedimenta, and was thus delivered of the unfortunate buoyancy which the life belts created, he dived directly down under the hull of the lugger, and having dived down, he swam with all his strength and swiftness under the water toward the bow of the craft, crossing under the keel as he did so, for fortunately the lugger was a centerboard craft, and her board had been raised.

But this device of Chick's saved him at least for the moment.

The half dozen or more Mongolians who had leaped into the water after him could not find him. He had disappeared as effectually as if the waters had indeed swallowed him.

Still Chick knew that he could not elude them for any length of time. He knew that the search for him would be indefatigable, and that ultimately he would be captured and summarily put to death unless he could discover some means of escape which had not yet developed, and which showed mighty poor chances of developing.

"This is the tightest box I was ever in yet," he muttered, "but I'm going to find a way out of it if there is one to be found."

He still had too much clothing on him for his good, and for celerity in swimming, and so he occupied the short time of respite he had at the bow of the boat in divesting himself of what he could.

It was a tedious task at best, and one difficult of accomplishment while he was in the water, but he did manage it somehow, and that before any of the Chinamen drew near enough to him to discover him at his task.

Presently, divested of everything save his under-clothing, and with one of his revolvers in his right hand—he had permitted the other to sink with his

clothes, since he could have no use for them—he began to work his way slowly backward toward the stern of the lugger, but taking care to keep as far away from it as possible and in the shadow of the wharf to which she was moored.

He had no fears of the consequences if only he could manage to meet one Chinaman at a time.

Not that he intended to use the revolver he had retained, although that would work as perfectly after its immersion in the water as before; he preferred to save that for the very last extremity.

He had covered half the distance and arrived at a point about amidships of the lugger when he had his first encounter—and fortunately it proved the last, also, for although he did not know it, many of his pursuers had already returned to the deck, convinced that he was drowned.

But he met this particular adversary in such a manner that they were together, and almost in each other's grasp, before either knew of the proximity of the other.

Herein Chick also had the advantage, for the Chinaman did not at once know that it was the man he sought who was before him; he did not know that Chick was not one of his own party, for in no other way could his slowness to act be accounted for.

Chick had him by the throat before he had an opportunity to cry out, and he held him in that manner until there was no further possibility of his making a noise; then he released him, and continued calmly on his way toward the stern.

Having nearly reached it, he permitted himself to sink to the bottom of the slip, and then with powerful strokes he struck out toward the great, portcullis-like entrance to the hollow bluff.

He had made up his mind that there was only one possible way of escape from that terrible place, and that unless he could find a way under it, or dig a hole under the great gate, he was hopelessly a prisoner, and so far as the future was concerned, already hopelessly dead.

He had not removed the big jackknife from between his teeth, since he had placed it there after cutting himself free from the impedimenta of clothing, and although it was difficult to swim under the water with

anything in his mouth, he managed to accomplish it by closing the blade of the knife, and then turning the handle so that he held it endwise in his lips.

He had measured the distance to the gate with great care before he started on that last supreme effort to reach it, and he was confident that it could be done, for he knew that to rise to the surface before he reached that point would mean that he would instantly be discovered.

But he did it.

His head swam and his brain buzzed like a circular saw before he finally touched the great door which, as he had suspected, was of iron, now badly corroded and barnacled, but still of iron.

There he allowed himself to rise to the surface for an instant, turning his head so that only his nostrils and lips protruded above the water.

And having thus revived himself with many draughts of air, he ventured to look about him.

His first glance in the direction of the lugger was startling.

He could see the big Chinaman standing on the deck issuing orders; he could see that new swimmers were dropping overboard, and that several of them were making toward the gate.

It was plain that the captain of the *Vampire* was not at all satisfied that the man who had gained access to his lair in such a remarkable way, was drowned, and that he proposed to view the body before he gave up the chase.

That one glance was all that Chick afforded himself; then he sank quickly to the bottom, and clinging to the door, worked his way along it there, to discover if possible some means of escape.

It seemed that there were none.

He crossed the entire width of the door without finding so much as a crevice through which he might have thrust the butt of his revolver.

He rose to the surface again for more air, and in doing so, he was startled to feel a colder strata of water as he rose.

"There is a hole in that door," he thought. "or there is an imperfection in the casing which holds it, for that

cold water must have come in from the outside. I'll get a breath of air and then I'll try again."

Thus he rose to the surface on the opposite side of the width of the door from where he had gone down.

At a glance he saw that two of the Chinamen who had been sent in his direction were almost upon him; that they would be at the door in another two minutes; and he saw the big Chinaman standing upon the stern of the lugger giving directions.

"My God!" he thought. "Have I got to die here like a rat in a trap?"

In his impatience and anger he kicked impatiently against the door behind him—that is, he kicked his foot against the spot where the door ought to have been, but his foot touched nothing, so that he was almost strangled by being drawn under, and had to rise to the top for more air whether he would or not.

Then, like lightning, a dozen thoughts ran through his brain.

"If that hole in the door is big enough, I can escape," was what he thought. "If it is not big enough I cannot escape and nothing can save me. I'm not going to die without leaving a mark behind me, anyhow!"

He raised himself in the water, and elevated the revolver at the same time.

He took a snap shot then, and he waited till he saw the big Chinaman totter and fall backward on the deck.

And then, once more, Chick dove beneath the surface.

CHAPTER X.

THE REVELATIONS OF THE HOLLOW BLUFF.

And now, if you please, we must return again to Nick Carter and Capt. Bill Jones, where they were seated under the great pine, studying the high bluff which they had jointly decided to be hollow, and speculating upon that hook of apparent land which ran out into the deep, but which was evidently what a theatrical man would call practicable.

It will be remembered that they had begun their discussion at the break of day, and that it had continued until the sun was rising—if there had been a sun to rise

that morning, which there was not, inasmuch as the rain had left behind it a mass of sullen clouds which refused to depart.

"Bill," said Nick, suddenly, after they had both been silent for a length of time, "I have decided that you are right. That bluff is hollow."

"You can bet your sweet life it is, sir."

"Chick is in there, if he is anywhere, and if he is a prisoner; there is small chance that we will find him alive."

"If those Chinamen catch him, they will kill him first and ask their questions afterward."

"Sure thing. Say, Bill."

"Well, sir?"

"Do you think you could find your way to a telephone, somewhere in the neighborhood?"

"Ay, ay, sir; leastwise, I can try."

"You can ask from house to house until you find one. It is true there aren't many houses in this immediate neighborhood, but I think you might run across one within a mile or two, as you go inland, and you can hire somebody to hitch up a horse and drive you to a telephone or a telegraph office, if you don't happen to strike what you want at the first house. Here is money. Take it and go."

"What am I to do, sir?"

"It is too early to get the collector of the port. Call up, or telegraph to the commandant of the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Give him the bearings of this point; you can do that even better than I can."

"Well, sir?"

The collector has already told him to hold his revenue cutters in readiness. They are not directly under his orders, I believe, but that will make no difference. Tell him that I am waiting here, and that I want a revenue cutter here—and one which can throw a fairly good shot at that—as soon as she can get here. The sound is comparatively quiet now—the wind has gone down and they will have no trouble in getting here."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"In short, Bill, tell him the story, and say that I am waiting here for assistance, and say that I want it as soon as they can get it here. Do you understand?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"All right, now go."

The sailor turned away, but he had not gone a dozen paces before Nick called him back.

"Come here, Bill," he said, quietly.

"Yes, sir; here I am."

"Look well out yonder toward the point—no, not toward the end of it; toward the spot where it joins onto the bluff. Do you see a dead spruce tree on the very end of the bluff?"

"I see a dead tree. I don't know whether it is a spruce or not, sir."

"Never mind; now look directly under it. Do you see a big rock, half out of water, where there is a white birch—a small one, just over it?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Do you see anything—look carefully—do you see anything——"

"You bet your life I do. It's a man; a dead man, lying across the rock and held in place by the little birch."

"It might be Chick, Bill," said Nick, quietly, and still without moving.

"Couldn't be," replied Bill. "Chick had his oils on. That fellow out there is almost naked."

"Yes; I thought of that; and still it might be Chick. I didn't see it, Bill, until just as you started away, and then I wasn't sure about it."

Then, suddenly Nick leaped to his feet all energy.

"You can wait a few moments about that message, Bill," he said; and he began rapidly to remove his clothes.

"What are you going to do?" asked Bill.

"I'm going to see who that is. Whoever gets to where he is has got to swim, and I'm going to swim. You are going to follow along the edge of the bluff as far as you can, and you can follow to within easy pistol shot of the place."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Take this pair of pistols. I don't suppose you could hit anything if you tried, and I don't suppose you'll have occasion to do so, but it is just as well to be prepared."

"Mr. Carter," said Bill, quietly, "I can hit a bull's-eye as far away as I can see it. If a Chink shows his head anywhere near where you are, I'll agree to hit it, sir."

"All right, old man; you're a corker. Come."

Nick was nude by this time.

He ran down the hillside, and without an instant's hesitation plunged into the water.

The distance from the shore to the place where Nick had discovered the body, half concealed upon the top of the boulder, was fully forty rods, but Nick was a rapid swimmer, and he covered the distance rapidly.

Bill watched him and saw him climb upon the rock. He saw him stoop over and raise tenderly in his arms the form of the man they had discovered on the rock. He saw him lay it down again, while he bent over and filled his hands time after time with water from the bay, so far down that he could scarcely reach it; and then he saw him wave his arms in a signal that all was well.

And there on the rock, Nick had found the unconscious form of Chick.

There was a deep gash, from which the blood had flowed profusely, in his forehead; there were gashes and jagged cuts on his shoulders and arms; on his hips and thighs. His whole body was in fact a mass of ugly cuts, from which he had lost a great amount of blood; but it was Chick, and Chick was alive.

Nick listened at first to see if the heart was still beating. Finding that it was, he dipped water up from the bay, and poured it into Chick's face, and he kept that in operation until the younger man opened his eyes wonderingly, smiled and closed them again.

"Brace up, Chick; it is I—Nick—old man," said Nick.

"I know it," replied Chick.

"Well, brace up. I want you to get strength enough to hang on to my neck. We've got to swim for it."

"I can do it in a moment, I think," replied Chick.

They waited a little, and presently Chick said:

"I guess we can do it now. The water will revive me, you know."

"All right. Come on."

They got into the water, Chick upon the back of Nick, and clinging to his neck with both hands.

It proved as he had said.

The water did revive him so that he was able to cling tightly to his friend, and so the distance back to the place where Bill Jones was awaiting them was accomplished.

"Nick," said Chick, when he had partially recovered, but was of course still very weak, "don't ever tell me that a man cannot get through a hole that is too small for him. I found a jagged hole in that iron door in there. It was all points and knives. It was three sizes too small, but it was a case of get through, or die in there, and I decided that I would rather die outside. They are in there, Nick."

"I know it. I knew it before we found you; but I owe it to Bill Jones that I do know it."

"Where is Bill?"

"He has gone to send for the revenue cutter."

"Good!"

"When it comes I am going to blow a hole through that iron door, Chick."

"I hope you'll borrow some clothes for me, so that I can see it."

"You shall see it, old man; don't you worry. Say, Chick!"

"Yes?"

"Tell me about that big vampire."

"Did you see Li Hung Chang when he was here?"

"Yes."

"Well, he looks like old Li, only he is about twice as big, and ten times as ugly."

"And as old?"

"Older. He's the oldest-looking man, and the ugliest, I ever saw; but I potted him, Nick."

"Do you think you killed him?"

"I don't know; I tried to."

* * * * *

The revenue cutter came late that afternoon.

During all the time that had intervened, Nick had watched unceasingly, but not a sign of life had appeared anywhere about the hollow bluff, and Nick began

to fear that there might be another means of entrance and egress from the place; but as events proved, there was not.

When the captain of the cutter was told what he was wanted to do, he at first refused.

He said it was sheer folly to fire into the side of a bluff, but when he was taken in a small boat, and shown that the neck, or point of land which formed the cove, was artificial, and when they went close to the door under which Chick had escaped, and by battering upon it demonstrated the fact that there was hollowness behind it, he hesitated no longer.

At the first fire of the bow gun of the cutter, the door began to rise, and presently, as the cutter drew off a bit, fearing a trap, a boat load of Chinamen came out and surrendered.

In all there were a hundred and thirty-three Chinese taken from that hollow bluff.

Thousands upon thousands of dollars' worth of opium and prizes recovered were five young Chinese girls, who had been brought here to be sold to Chinese merchants for wives when they should have matured.

It was found, moreover, that the captain of the *Vampire* had kept for years an accurate account of his dealings.

Through these accounts, thirty-one moderately prominent Chinamen of New York and adjacent cities were implicated and convicted of crimes against the government.

Not the least of their discoveries was that the temple of the Demon of the Night was one of Capt. Vampire's institutions, in order to appease the religious longings of his followers, and render them contented; and it was furthermore ascertained that the little Yaks of Thibet, who had committed the murders in Prospect Park, were among his importations.

He had not been able to dispose of them, and so had set them at liberty, to prey as they would upon the people of Brooklyn.

THE END.

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